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ABSTRACT

Public school teachers often work in "classroom cells" that are "symbols and predictive of their relative isolation from one another and from sources of ideas beyond their own background of experience." This type of environment, where teachers rarely join in collaborative endeavors and spend little of their professional time with other adult professionals to improve their knowledge and skills, is a leading factor in teacher job dissatisfaction. Teacher education has contributed to the problems of the teacher workplace by not empowering teachers to change either the structure or the atmosphere of the school as workplace. Teachers have lacked the self-esteem, prestige, and intellectual skills to exert sufficient power in the bureaucratic structure. For the workplace to change, teachers must be empowered, with teacher education reform central to that empowerment. Programs are needed that can provide the intellectual power to analyze policy and to effectively participate in policy debates, including those having to do with daily work in the schools. (CB)

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Teacher Education To Change the Workplace

Clinton B. Allison

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American teachers are an unhappy lot. The turnover is high and, as the recent Carnegie study puts it, teaching is an "early exit occupation."[1] According to national polls only about 20 percent of teachers "certainly would" become teachers if they were able to choose again. Fifty-one percent of teachers say they have "seriously considered" leaving teaching for another occupation, and 40 percent of Tennessee teachers do leave the profession during their first seven years in the classroom.[2] Those that stay are often miserable in their work, and those that leave generally have a much higher degree of satisfaction with almost every aspect of their non-teaching jobs, including higher salaries, less job stress, and greater control over their work.[3] The dissatisfaction of public school teachers is hardly a secret. The polls confirm what we too frequently see in the unhappy professional lives of our spouses, children, and friends who are teachers. Yet we in teacher education, hoping to recruit at least some of the brightest and best into teaching, are often (I suspect usually) reluctant to treat the "rewards" of teaching realistically.

It is beyond the scope of this presentation to inquire into the causes of teacher dissatisfaction, much less to attempt a hierarchy of causes, a misery index. That sort of literature is abundant. Rather, I will examine with you the teachers' workplace--according to thirty years of literature--a central issue in teachers' unhappiness with their occupation and the subject of a college-wide study in The University of Tennessee: "The Quality of

SP029452

the Educational Workplace Project," funded in part by a U.S. Department of Education grant. More specifically, as a dissatisfier with the teacher workplace, I will concentrate on teachers lack of control over time during their workday--an issue which is central to a consideration of professionalism.

A teacher in many public schools is in an analogous situation with a lion tamer who is asked to spend six continuous hours in a cage of bored lions, putting them through their unnatural paces. The recent reform documents recognize the seriousness of the problem although they describe it in more restrained ways. Goodlad writes of the "classroom cells" where teachers work and which are "symbols and predictive of their relative isolation from one another and from sources of ideas beyond their own background of experience." They have, he continues, only "brief and casual kinds of associations" and rarely join "in collaborative endeavors."[4] The Shopping Mall High School discusses the need for conversations among teachers about education and students:[5]

> It is more important to organize school time so that such conversations can occur, than to impose an ideal curriculum on schools from the outside...rearranging school time in this manner empowers teachers by placing them in the center of educational decision-making rather than on the periphery. It empowers good teachers by removing the protective isolation that allows the mediocre to survive and the competent to remain impotent.

The Holmes report complains that teachers "still spend all of their professional time alone with students, leaving little or no time for work with other adult professionals to improve their knowledge and skills. Professional teachers need time "to reflect, plan, discuss...with their colleagues," echoes Carnegie.[6] Sixty-eight percent of Tennessee teachers report that they have little or no time to talk with colleagues about what they are doing. Maxine Greene wrote of Teacher as Stranger; in Tennessee (and in many other places) we can describe Teacher as Loner.[7] One teacher in the

Quality of Workplace Study dismissed a question about the social setting of the workplace with, "I have 10 minutes for lunch."[8]

I took a study trip to visit schools in the United Kingdom this summer. I am not one of those who find a panacea in the English experience; along with the obvious problems of cultural difference, it is too easy for an uninformed visitor to make faulting judgments; besides they have their own serious problems. But, for those close to American elementary schools, a principal cause for envy was the morning and afternoon breaks, when the children were dismissed to the playing fields and teachers retired to the staff room for tea and biscuits, animated conversations, and quick consultations. When this difference became a topic of conversation between English teachers and members of our group over lunch (and wine in the school library to add to cultural shock) one English teacher was appalled to discover that many American elementary teachers have no breaks and little contact with other teachers. "Good Lord," she exclaimed, "how do you renew yourself during the day?" How indeed?

My argument is that teacher education has contributed to the problems of the teacher workplace and is central to the eventual alleviation of the problem. Teacher education has not empowered teachers to change either the structure or the atmosphere of school as workplace. Teachers have lacked the self-esteem, prestige, or intellectual skills to exert sufficient power in the bureaucratic structure that David Tyack has critically called the One Best System. Relatively powerless, they have tended to remain docile members of pedagogical harems.

Lortie, over a decade ago, pondered with concern teacher preparation that did not "seem to result in the analytic turn of mind one finds in other occupations whose members are trained in colleges and universities."[9] Rather,

he found that teacher education fostered "conformist, unquestioning, other-dependent orientations," with much of the source in "group management" orientation and emphasis on lower instead of higher field experiences.[10]

Teacher education programs have provided schooling for a semiprofession, for an underclass profession. This criticism of teacher education is somewhat analogous to the radical historical critique of industrial education for blacks and other members of America's underclasses--to teach the values, including conformity and a sense of service, which the dominate society thought was necessary for their life adjustment. Obviously, change in the teacher workplace can result without reform in teacher education. Union/management agreements can mandate structured changes. Indeed Bellon, in the "Quality of the Educational Workplace Project" mentioned before, found that in school systems with strong union contracts more time was available for professional exchanges and teachers were more satisfied with their workplace. I do not belittle these gains or the means used to secure them, but I do argue that a workplace or professional practice is more likely to result when teachers are professionally and intellectually enhanced as well as politically empowered. A workplace for professional practice requires continuing adjustment and readjustment of facilities, time, and colloquial relationships. Contracts cannot effectively contend with the ambiguities of professional practice. Albert Shanker last year in Instructor, in commenting on the need for a professional workplace for teachers, concluded that the necessary form of "participatory management...cannot be brought about by collective bargaining," that collective bargaining could only "hold on to what we have."[11]

Our goal is not just to remove teacher dissatisfiers but to enhance opportunities for professional practice. The Holmes and Carnegie proposals

agree that reform of teacher education can improve the workplace--"to make schools better places for practicing teachers to work and learn," the Holmes reports says, "to provide a professional environment for teaching" echoes Carnegie.[12] Both reports are somewhat disappointing in that they fail to analyze in any detail how extended teacher education will result in an improved teacher workplace.

Holmes proposes the establishment of Professional Development Schools where education professors and public school faculties remedy "contemporary problems associated with the teaching workplace and narrowly concerned teacher roles," where "working conditions are created that allow for the demonstration and evaluation of the very best in teaching practice."[13] Of course such demonstration schools would not require a post-baccalaureate teacher education program. Indeed, Willis Hawley, a participant in the Holmes Group deliberations, agrees with the Report that the central problem of recruiting and retraining able teachers is "working conditions in the schools." But, he argues, "reforms in the teachers' workplace does not require changes in teacher education."[14]

I am convinced, however, that for the workplace to change, teachers must be empowered and that reformed teacher education is central to their empowerment. In part, it is a matter of perception. Teachers need to be perceived as able students who have successfully competed with arts and science majors for degrees and have had further rigorous preparation for their profession: "Teachers," Carnegie insists, "must be among the best educated people in their community." Teacher educators, Holmes admonishes, must bestow only "genuine credentials that reflect the highest standards and the most rigorous preparation possible."[15] A critical mass of persons perceived to be intellectually able with the resulting sense of self-esteem would have an excellent chance of creating professional working conditions.

The paramount objective of the reports is producing teachers who will enhance student learning. "We are describing people of substantial intellectual accomplishments," according to the Carnegie Forum, "who can communicate what they do to others...and create environments in which young people can learn."[16] These same attributes are functional for changing the workplace.

Surely, one does not have to endorse the reports to agree that a B.A. in Arts and Sciences has utility for changing the workplace. As a minimum a liberal arts program ought to develop six skills:[17]

> the ability to read, write and speak with clarity and precision; the habits of disciplined inquiry; some understanding of cultures other than our own; a sense of the interconnectedness of our world and its sociological, biological and physical dimensions; a sense of the larger issues of our lives and time and their significance on a personal, ethical and global scale; and, through the in-depth study of one chosen area, an appreciation of the methods, boundaries, implications and relationships of a particular discipline.

These are skills that are functional, that empower. They can be used to make teachers more articulate champions of their professional workplace. They assault the "reflexive conservatism" that Lortie warned about, and that keeps teachers in "their place." They can provide the intellectual power to analyze policy and to effectively participate in policy debates, including those having to do with day-to-day work in their own schools.

NOTES

1. A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century, The Report of the Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, May 1986.

2. Louis Harris and Associates, Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, New York: Metropolitan Life and Affiliated Companies, 1985; Susan J. Rosenholtz, Otto C. Bassler, and Kathleen V. Shoover-Dempsey, "Why Teachers Quit," Tennessee Teachers (March 1986).

3. Carnegie Forum, 98.

4. John I Goodlad, A Place Called School (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1984):186-187.

5. Arthur G. Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David K. Cohen, The Shopping Mall High School: Winners and Losers in the Educational Marketplace, quoted in Carnegie Forum, 40.

6. Carnegie Forum, 60.

7. Rosehnoltz.

8. Interview, Quality of the Educational Workplace Project, College of Education, The University of Tennessee.

9. Merlin C. Wittrock, ed., Handbook of Research on Teaching, 3rd. edition, American Educational Research Association, 1986, 550.

10. Ibid.

11. Albert Shanker, "Futrell and Shanker Face Off," Instructor (October 1985):35.

12. Tomorrow's Teachers: A Report of the Holmes Group, (East Lansing, MI, The Holmes Group, Inc., 1986):67; Carnegie Forum, 3.

13. Holmes, 88.

14. Willis D. Hawley, "A Critical Analysis of the Holmes Group's Proposals for Reforming Teacher Education," Journal of Teacher Education (July-August 1986):49.

15. Holmes, 43.

16. Carnegie Forum, 25.

17. Frank H. T. Rhodes, "The Selling of the Liberal Arts," National Forum (Summer 1985):3.